



# Mount Saviour Chronicle

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF MOUNT SAVIOUR  
P.O. BOX 272, ELMIRA, NEW YORK

NUMBER 14

EASTER, 1959

Dear Friends of Mount Saviour,

With the joy of spiritual longing, we look forward to the holy feast of Easter, to that blessed hour when, out of the darkness of night, the light shines forth and the deacon's voice proclaims "Lumen Christi". As our senses and hearts respond "Deo gratias", we approach the Easter Candle, and take light from the Light that never fails that our new life may glorify Christ who is risen from the dead. The beauty, the blessedness, the whole meaning of our life as Christians is represented in this simple action.

No day passes without making us realize the cruelty of life, the deceitfulness of the human heart, "deep beyond sounding, sick beyond cure." (Jeremias 17:9). In our helplessness, we confess with the Church on Holy Thursday: "The Lord has delivered me into a hand out of which I am not able to rise." (Lamentations 1:14) And then in the night of a thousand anxieties and dangers, of cruelty and deceit, of injustice and coldness of heart, we hear the triumphant voice: "Christ is risen—He is truly risen!" In the power of this blessed truth, a new life is born in us, a life beyond anxiety and fear, a life that knows no death.

## CHRIST'S EASTER GIFT

If we want to know the kind of life the Risen Christ has brought to us, we have only to note the effect the Easter message had on the group of women who first heard it. With their hearts full of grief and compassion, they were "seeking the living among the dead." (Luke 24:5) Bound to the Lord by bonds of the most tender affection, Mary Magdalene stood outside the sepulchre weeping, stooping down and looking into it, and even

when she recognized her master's voice, she still clung to his bodily presence. Then the words were spoken to her which at once satisfied and exalted her affection: "Go to your brethren and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father; to my God and your God." (John 20:17) She had found her true Father, her true Brother and her family, not according to the manner of the flesh, but of the spirit.

While the Easter message lifted the burden of human grief from the hearts of the women, the minds of the men were cured of perplexity and doubt. The light of understanding flooded the two disciples when, on their way to Emmaus, the Lord "expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things that were concerning him." Their hearts burned at his teaching, and when "he took bread, and blessed and broke and gave to them, their eyes were opened and they knew him." (Luke 24:30-31) Another disciple St. Thomas, who believed, but really without hope, was allowed to touch the open side and saw at once what had not yet been seen, the glory of the Risen Lord as well as the majesty of his divinity (cf. John 20:26-28).

The effect of the presence and the teachings of the Risen Saviour upon those who were around him during the forty days between his Resurrection and his Ascension is summed up by St. Luke: "They were always in the temple blessing and praising God." (Luke 24:53) This then is the life the Risen Saviour left to his Church, where it has never died out. We call it "the contemplative life" and are tempted to consider it the exclusive privilege of those called to the seclusion of the cloister.

But the Resurrection has thrown open the gates of eternal life to all Christians not only in hope but in reality,



and the contemplative life and the active life complement each other. Every Christian is invited to share in the glories of the Resurrection. The entire Church celebrates the Fifty Days between Easter and Pentecost as the sacramental image of the heavenly life she has received on Easter. These Fifty Days represent the "contemplative life". But there is an important fact to be remembered. Preceding the Fifty Days were the Forty Days of Lent representing the "active life", because during this time we follow the example of Martha by serving the needs of mankind in works of charity. Only those who have died with Christ in Lent, live with him in the "Alleluia", as the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost were commonly called.

This relation between the active and the contemplative life marks a tremendous change from the ideas that were current in antiquity, before the Word was made flesh. At that time, the contemplative life was the privilege of a few possessing the means and the leisure to withdraw from the hustle and bustle of affairs to devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of truth. Plato, in his great dialogues, "Phaedo" and "The Banquet", gave the philosophical idea of contemplation its classical form.

Socrates drinking the cup of poison is the counterpart of Christ dying on the Cross. Plato's "The Banquet" is the parallel of St. John's description of the Last Supper. There can be no doubt that the description of the philosopher as the death of the soul to the world of the senses, which Socrates develops in Phaedo, has influenced the thinking of Christian ascetics, who long to exclude all bodily images from their contact with the invisible Godhead. Likewise, Plato's description in "The Banquet" of the gradual ascent of "eros" has offered the model for the "mystical ladders" of our spiritual writers. Yet the fact that the Word of God did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but humbled himself, taking the form of a slave and being obedient unto death (cf. Philippians 2:6-8), has radically changed the whole concept of the contemplative life. Christian contemplation is not the attempt of the philosopher to raise his mind to the vision of unchangeable ideas. It is rather the living embrace which man, as the prodigal son, receives at his homecoming from his heavenly Father. Love has become the soul of contemplation, not the "eros" of Plato, but the "agape" of the Son of God, who leaves the ninety-nine sheep on the mountain to search for the one that is lost in the valley. The power of his love unites contemplation and action. His going forth from God and his coming to God form the full circle of his life into which we enter by celebrating with him his Last Supper with his disciples, his Death on the Cross, his Burial and his passing into the glory of the Resurrection.

## HOLY THURSDAY

"Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that the hour had come for him to pass out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end. And during the supper, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from the supper and laid aside his garments, and taking a towel girded himself. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples, and to dry them with the towel with which he was girded." (John 13:1-5) Jesus acts as the true "philosopher" who knows what he is doing. But his is not an abstract knowledge of unchangeable ideas. He acts in the knowledge of the Son of God made man who fully knows his Father's heart and enters willingly into its eternal designs of love toward man. "Knowing that the hour had come for him to pass out of this world" — the knowledge of God's servant who knows the hour the Father's will has set for him whose obedience unto death is "love unto the end" for his own who are in the world. "Knowing that the Father had given all things into his hand . . ." — the knowledge of the Lord, who "though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave" (Philippians 2:6) and therefore "laid aside his garments, and taking a towel girded himself" to do the work of a slave washing the feet of his disciples.

The revelation of the most sublime truths which Jesus communicated to his disciples in his discourses at the Last Supper were accompanied by his washing the feet of the apostles, combining as he did, the highest "theoria" with perfect obedience in the service of fraternal charity. He did this to give us an example, and the setting of the Last Supper has remained the model upon which contemplative life in the Church is formed. It was the task of the great lawgivers of monastic life, of a St. Pachomius in Egypt, a St. Basil in the East, a St. Benedict in the West, to protect the longing for contemplative life from the pitfalls of selfishness by incorporating the exercise of fraternal charity, not as a distraction of the mind, but as a purification of the heart.

## GOOD FRIDAY

Not only the mystery of Holy Thursday belongs to the fullness of contemplative life, but also Good Friday. As at the Last Supper, also in his Passion, Christ acts as the perfect "contemplative". "Knowing all that was to come upon him" he delivered himself into the hands of his enemies. (John 18:4) Again, with a knowledge that



fills all the wisdom of the Prophets, he brings about the end: "Knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said: I thirst. (John 19:28) In perfect obedience unto the death, the Lord speaks that word by which all action passes into the perfect rest of contemplation: It is consummated! (John 19:30) Obedience has remained the seal which, in the Church, seals the fountain of contemplation.

Neither community life nor religious obedience can be considered merely organized means to greater efficiency for fighting God's battles in the various field of external achievements. They are meant, first of all, to help the soul to die that "death" which leads to the fullness of contemplation. This "death" is completely different from the philosophical death which Socrates speaks of in Plato's "Phaedo". It is the death of which St. Paul speaks commending some still living in the flesh: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3) It is the death of the "old man" brought about by renouncing one's own will.

In one of his famous homilies on the Canticle of Canticles, St. Bernard inveighs against those among his monks who, under the pretext of more contemplation, spurn obedience to their superiors and to the customs of the house. Commenting on the verse "Our bed is strewn with flowers" he says: "It would be a complete inversion of the proper order to ask for the reward before you had earned it, and to seize your dinner before you had done your work! Do not imagine that your love of quiet and repose may be allowed to interfere with the activities obedience lays on you, or with your observance of community traditions. The Bridegroom will certainly not share with you a couch strewn, not with flowers of obedience, but with hemlock and nettles of disobedience! He will not heed your prayers when it is thus with you, nor come when he is called: He, who so loved obedience that he preferred to die rather than disobey, will most assuredly refuse his blessings to a disobedient man. Nor will the empty idleness that you call contemplation find favor in the sight of him who, as an exile from his heavenly fatherland of perfect rest, wrought in the midst of earth the work of our salvation."

#### HOLY SATURDAY

The day, however, most closely associated with contemplation is Holy Saturday. Just as the six days of creation were followed by the seventh day on which "God rested from all his work" (Gen. 2:2), Christ after the six days of his Passion entered into the rest of the tomb, prefiguring the Eternal Sabbath when "he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all other sovereignty, authority and power." (I Corinthians 15:24) Into this rest, all of God's people, all those "who have

learned to believe" (Heb. 4:3) are called. Faith is perfect trust in God's charity (cf. John 4:46-54), and contemplation, in the Christian sense, is the hiding of the soul in God's love. "Like the dead we are hidden in a tomb, when mortified in our members we hide in the secret chamber of intimate contemplation. Holy men used to mortify themselves unceasingly through the sword of God's word, with regard to the pressing needs of the time, the tumult of vain cares and noisy distractions and withdraw into the inner man before the face of God in the innermost recess of their mind. This happens in a perfect way only later, but it is begun already now when they are carried away from the tumult of passing desires into the delights of the interior life, so that their mind remains unruffled by senseless distractions, while drawn with full power to the love of God. Who longs for death rejoices when he finds the tomb, for whoever seeks to die to himself comes with great joy to the rest of contemplation, to be extinguished and concealed before the world, to hide from all confusion of external things in the womb of deepest love." (St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia* V.6,n.9)

#### CON-TEMPLATION

We see that, under the influence of Revelation, the word "contemplation" has taken on a new meaning. In the language of the philosophers, the Latin term "contemplari" served as a translation of the Greek "theorein" which means the action of fixing one's gaze on a certain object so as to rest in its clear perception. But the root-meaning of the word "con-templation" is different. It signifies the bringing together of two "temples" or "sections" which although belonging to different worlds, yet correspond to each other, or reflect each other. It is this latter notion which catches much better the Christian meaning of contemplation. The origin of Christian contemplation and the goal to which it aspires is in heaven, in the bosom of the Holy Trinity. The "Word" is the "temple" which, in the most perfect way, corresponds to the Father. When the Word was made flesh, two other "temples", the divine and the human nature, were brought to the most perfect correspondence in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. He spoke of himself as the "temple" which would be destroyed, but raised up again by him on the third day. (John 2:19-22) Then the temple of his body would grow into the temple of God's people, with Christ Jesus as the head stone, in whom the whole structure is closely fitted together. "Con-templation" is then the entire process by which we are being built together in the Risen Lord to become a dwelling place for the Father in the spirit. (cf. Ephesians 2:19-22)

Because all Christians are called to be fitted as living stones into the spiritual temple of the Church, con-templation should be the common characteristic of the life of



11. If you ask: How can this be done without everyone entering a monastery?, the answer is that the beginning of con-templation is the community spirit of which Christ has left us the example at the Last Supper. It can be lived in every family, in every parish, in ever neighborhood. A higher stage of contemplation is reached by the death which kills our self-will. Every Christian has died this death when he was buried with Christ in baptism, and he dies the same death every day through that abandonment in Divine Providence which fills his life with the calmness and steadiness of God's love. This death enables us, when our hour has come, to surpass Socrates by saying with the Son of God: It is consummated. Instilled as it is with life, this death leads us already here on earth to a still higher degree of contemplation, the rest in the womb of deepest love which assures us that "where sin abounded, grace does much more abound." (Romans 5:21) But who could rest in this love without being lifted up to a still higher stage of contemplation when not our voice only, not our mind only, but our heart, and still more, "all that is within us" calls out: "Amen. Alleluia!" "Amen" means "in very truth" and "Alleluia" means "praise God".

"Amen. Alleluia!" is the song of those who, with their faces unveiled reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Risen Lord, are transfigured into this very image from glory to glory.

May the solemnity of the Resurrection lift up your hearts to touch the Lord's glory, so that you may be able to make your own the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch: "For I write to you in the midst of life, yet in love with death, for my eros has been crucified. And there is not within me any fire of earthly desire, but only water that lives and speaks in me, within me murmuring: 'Come to the Father'. I have no pleasure in the food of corruption, nor in the pleasures of this material life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, and for drink I desire His blood. This is the agape which knows not corruption." (Ad Romanos VII).

Devotedly yours in Christ,

*F. Rembert Wigman, O.S.B.*

#### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- May 3, Sunday — St. Scholastica League Day of Recollection
- June 7, Sunday — Rochester and Elmira Oblates Day of Recollection
- June 15, Monday — Saturday, 20 — Priests' Retreat
- June 24, Wednesday — Sunday, 28 — Sodality Retreat, Our Lady, Queen of Apostles, Syracuse
- July 25, Saturday — Ordination of Fr. Benedict Tighe
- July 26, Sunday — First Mass
- August 16, Sunday — Dedication Day
- September 13, Sunday — St. Scholastica League Day of Recollection

#### MASS STIPENDS

Word has just been received from the Most Reverend Bishop of Rochester that, beginning April 1st, the offering for a low Mass will be three dollars; for a low Mass to be said on a specific date, five dollars; and for a high Mass, n dollars. Mass intentions accompanied by smaller offerings will be gratefully received, but will be sent to missions and monasteries abroad.

#### DEDICATION DAY

On August 16th, we shall celebrate our annual Dedication Day, anniversary of the blessing of the Chapel of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. This is always an occasion for a large gathering of our friends. At the bazaar held on this day, articles are put on sale for the benefit of the monastery. We depend much on the success of this for our summer expenses. All are asked to contribute articles which can be sold on this occasion. These can be mailed to: Mount Saviour Monastery, P. O. Box 272, Elmira, New York.

#### ST. JAMES GUESTHOUSE

We are very happy to announce a long overdue re-decoration of St. James Guesthouse for ladies has taken place during the winter months. All those who have stayed at St. James will recall how badly in need of repairs it was. We invite them to return and see the transformation. During the summer months, we hope to have the exterior painted and to shingle the half of the roof we have had to leave unshingled. The constant financial demands for property upkeep as you can imagine are a tremendous burden. We are—and shall be—most grateful for your help.